United Nations A/59/PV.67

General Assembly
Fifty-ninth session

Official Records

67th plenary meeting
Monday, 6 December 2004, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Ping ..... (Gabon)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Dauth (Australia), Vice President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Agenda item 94

Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family

Report of the Secretary-General (A/59/176)

Letter from Qatar (A/59/592)

Draft resolution (A/59/L.29)

The Acting President: This morning the General Assembly will, in accordance with Assembly resolution 57/164 of 18 December 2002, devote one plenary meeting to the observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family under agenda item 94, "Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family".

Under that item, the Assembly has before it the following documents: the report of the Secretary-General circulated in document A/59/176, a letter dated 2 December 2004 from the representative of Qatar transmitting the text of the Doha Declaration of the Doha International Conference for the Family and contained in document A/59/592, as well as a draft resolution issued as document A/59/L.29.

I will now deliver the message of the President of the General Assembly on the occasion of the observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family.

"I wish to welcome all of you this morning to this plenary meeting of the General Assembly to observe the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family.

"In the 10 years since the observance of the International Year of the Family, great attention has been given to family policies in many countries. The issue of family policy remains firmly the responsibility of national Governments and local authorities. Indeed, the General Assembly also decided that the major activities for the observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family should be concentrated at the local, national and regional levels.

"Governments continue to recognize the family as the primary means for people to live together and to provide mutual nurturing and support. At the same time, family situations continue to change and to diversify, and social disparities exist, especially in terms of structures, functions, living arrangements and living conditions. Consequently, many countries have found it necessary to review their own policies in

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an effort to keep abreast of changing family circumstances, needs and expectations.

"There is growing awareness that a more comprehensive approach should be taken to harmonize actions on behalf of the family. The family dimension should be taken into account in all aspects of policy and efforts made to ensure that sectoral policies complement those that deal directly with the family and its specific needs. It is, therefore, important for Governments to develop a more integrated family policy — taking into account education, employment, and health care issues, for instance — that effectively and visibly complements existing sectoral policies and attempts to meet the needs of individuals, while recognizing that they are also members of families. An integrated family policy should also overcome the difficulties of coordinating different social administrations and departments.

"Moreover, while the responsibility for developing family policy and considering the impact of other policies on families remains with national Governments, they will likely wish to work closely with civil society, the private sector and all other concerned actors in developing and implementing family policy frameworks. Local authorities should take part in drafting and evaluating the family policy, in implementing the policy measures and in adapting them to regional and local requirements.

"In preparation for the observance of the tenth anniversary, many Governments have taken measures that have long-term implications for family policies and programmes. It is, therefore, fitting to review some of the activities that have been taking place at the national level over the 10 years since the declaration of the International Year of the Family in 1994.

"During the past 10 years, encouraged by resolutions and recommendations of the General Assembly, a number of countries have reviewed their constitutions and legal systems regarding issues relating to families, children, adolescents and youth, older persons and persons with disabilities. Many countries have also enacted or considered new laws that directly benefit families. The laws and bills show that there is special interest in strengthening parent-child relations, dealing with conjugal and family disputes, helping people balance work and family responsibilities, protecting mothers and promoting measures related to the health and well-being of family members.

"Both central and local Governments have established policies, programmes or services that target families as beneficiaries, either directly or indirectly. A main objective is to allocate adequate financial benefits to families, in particular to those living in conditions of scarcity, in order to help them meet more readily the expenses associated with caring for family members.

"Several countries have organized national conferences to observe the tenth anniversary. Others have organized seminars and panel discussions, often in partnership with non-governmental organizations. I particularly welcome the Doha Declaration of 30 November 2004, which reaffirmed international commitments to the family, including United Nations resolutions and declarations, and called upon all Governments, international organizations and members of civil society to take effective measures to support the family in times of peace and in times of war.

"Governments everywhere have fulfilled their commitment to mark the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. And while family policies remain firmly the responsibility of national Governments, the United Nations provides essential international attention, recognition, assistance and support to national Governments. One of the main objectives of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family is to revitalize public awareness of family issues and to renew support for family policies and programmes. In being here today, we are ensuring international attention for an issue of vital importance for all peoples of the world."

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General.

The Secretary-General: Concern for the well-being of families dates back to the earliest days of the United Nations. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims the family to be the "natural and fundamental group unit of society ... entitled to protection by society and the State" (*resolution 217 A (III), article 16, para. 3*). Our long-standing work for

children, for the advancement of women, for health, for literacy and for social integration reflects an enduring, system-wide commitment to families.

The International Year of the Family was meant to intensify this focus and to promote greater awareness of what families contribute to economic development and social progress in all societies all over the world. Indeed, the Year's most far-reaching achievement was to raise the profile of a family perspective, which had never received attention commensurate with its importance. Today, we can note with satisfaction that the family dimension is increasingly reflected in national development policies and programmes, as well as in the activities of the United Nations system.

This anniversary is an opportunity to reaffirm the importance and centrality of the family. But it should also incite us to do more to address the challenges that families face. Families take many different forms. The situation of families varies from country to country, and within countries. But all confront very serious pressures. The AIDS epidemic, for example, is creating more and more orphans and imposing new burdens on caregivers such as grandparents. Migration, which can generate opportunities, can also increase vulnerability and keep families separated for extended periods of time. And, in many countries, efforts to reconcile work and family life are proving very difficult.

Family structures continue to change. Where once people lived in extended families, today they live increasingly in nuclear families. Decreasing fertility rates, increasing life expectancy, delayed marriage and growing numbers of people living alone contribute to smaller families. Traditional gender roles continue to evolve as more women work outside the home and more men contribute to the work within it. Those trends and phenomena are related and, in some cases, mutually reinforcing. They are also being spurred on by global integration.

In spite of strains and adversity, families are proving resilient, often in remarkable ways. They are doing their best to pull together and to continue serving as a source of strength and inspiration for their members. But they need help. Governments need to do more to help families adapt and thrive, so that they can, in turn, fulfil their social, cultural and economic roles.

One major challenge is to integrate family concerns with broader development and poverty eradication efforts. We must not forget that the family is a vital partner in efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and the many other objectives set by the international community during the last decade.

Strong, healthy family structures are essential for human well-being as well. Families are often our first line of support. Policies and programmes must recognize such contributions. The United Nations, for its part, will continue to draw attention to family issues and to support Governments and civil society in their efforts to address them.

The Acting President: I give the floor to the representative of Qatar to introduce draft resolution A/59/L.29.

Mr. Al-Sulaiti (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have the honour of introducing, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, draft resolution A/59/L.29, entitled "Celebrating the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family", submitted under item 94 of the agenda of the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly.

The importance of family-related issues and the recognition of the fact that the role of the family in society is essential and vital enjoy universal acceptance, regardless of cultural, political or national backgrounds and interests. Major United Nations instruments on social policy and human rights, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Declaration on Social Progress and Development all emphasize the important role of the family in society and the fact that the greatest possible protection and assistance should be accorded to the family.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in paragraph 3 of article 16, put it eloquently and succinctly:

> "The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State."

Indeed, the General Assembly realized that the family, as the basic unit of social life, is a major agent of sustainable development at all levels of society. The General Assembly acknowledged also that the family is the fullest reflection, at the grass-roots level, of social and developmental strengths and weaknesses and, as such, offers uniquely comprehensive and synthesizing approaches to social issues.

The major United Nations conferences in the social field held in the 1990s all noted that the family, as the basic unit of society, should be strengthened and should receive comprehensive protection and support. The family-oriented provisions and the outcomes of those conferences and their follow-up processes provide guidance on ways to strengthen the family-centred components of policies and programmes as part of an integrated, comprehensive approach to development.

The General Assembly, in its resolutions 56/113 of 19 December 2001 and 57/164 of 18 December 2002, encouraged regional commissions and invited Member States to organize activities in preparation for an observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family and to make efforts to achieve its objectives.

On 3 December 2003, the General Assembly welcomed the decision of Governments, non-governmental organizations and civil society to host conferences and events in observance of the tenth anniversary of the Year of the Family. It invited United Nations bodies and agencies and civil society to support regional events in 2004. Events were held on 15 May 2004, the International Day of Families, and throughout the year. Today, even before the year is over, we can see that the response of the international community has been strong and that productive action will be taken to protect and support the family.

In drafting this text, the principal sponsors kept in mind the fact that its main purpose is to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, as its title reads, and to recognize the positive response of civil society to the call made last year by the General Assembly to commemorate this anniversary. The sponsors were intent on drafting a resolution that is concise, to the point and contains elements compatible with its purpose and that are appropriate for adoption at this special commemorative meeting of the General Assembly.

After document A/59/L.29 was issued, and in order to address the concerns expressed by other delegations about parts of the text, the sponsors of the draft resolution made the following revisions.

The last two words of the fourth preambular paragraph have been replaced by the following phrase: "pertinent to the International Year of the Family". In the middle of the fifth preambular paragraph, the phrase "in support of the family" has been replaced by the phrase "in disregard". Operative paragraphs 3, 4 and 5 have been replaced by the following paragraphs.

Operative paragraph 3 now reads:

> "Commends the important contributions made by Governments on the international, national and regional and local levels to observe the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family".

Operative paragraph 4 now reads:

> "Welcomes the hosting of the Regional Conference on the Family in Africa by Benin and takes note with appreciation of the Plan of Action on the Family in Africa".

Operative paragraph 5 now reads:

> "Welcomes the hosting of the Doha International Conference for the Family by the State of Qatar and takes note with appreciation of the Doha Declaration".

Operative paragraph 8 has been replaced by the following paragraph:

> "Recommends that all relevant actors, including, inter alia, Governments and civil society, including relevant non-governmental organizations and research and academic institutions, contribute to developing strategies and programmes aimed at strengthening the livelihood of families".

Operative paragraph 10 has been replaced by the following paragraph:

> "Decides to celebrate the anniversary of the International Year of the Family periodically on a 10-year basis".

These revisions eliminate contentious language and the result is a balanced text that the sponsors believe can be adopted by consensus.

Since document A/59/L.29 was issued, the following Member States have joined the list of sponsors: Azerbaijan, Belarus, Republic of Moldova and the United States of America. We thank the sponsors of the draft resolution and urge Assembly members to adopt it by consensus at today's special commemorative meeting.

I shall now speak on behalf of the State of Qatar.

I am honoured to report to the General Assembly the extensive activities carried out by the State of Qatar to promote and celebrate the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family under the patronage and generosity of Her Highness Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser al-Misnad, consort of His Highness the Emir of the State of Qatar, and president of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs.

Qatar convened the Doha International Conference for the Family on 29 and 30 November 2004. The decision to host the Conference was welcomed by resolution 58/15 of 15 December 2003. The Conference analysed and reaffirmed article 16, paragraph 3, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which proclaims that the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State. The Conference brought together a broad range of stakeholders representing diverse religions, groupings, political systems and States. Those stakeholders were united by the common understanding that, by protecting the natural and fundamental group unit of society, communities, nations, regions and the world, will not only encourage sustainable development but further the intercultural understanding that is the necessary foundation of a stable, secure and just world.

As noted by the Secretary-General in paragraph 4 of his report (A/59/176) on this item,

> "families have major, albeit often untapped potential to contribute to national development and to the achievement of major objectives of every society and of the United Nations, including the eradication of poverty and the creation of just, stable and secure societies."

The Doha International Conference for the family was designed to begin to bridge this gap. The Conference reaffirmed fundamental international norms related to the family and established proposals for action that will provide a firm foundation for research, discussion and policy development related to family life during the coming decade.

The preparatory process for the Doha Conference included Government meetings in Cotonou, Benin; Baku, Azerbaijan; and Riga, Latvia. The process was also enriched by a series of regional dialogues in Mexico City, Stockholm, Geneva, and Kuala Lumpur.

In addition, hundreds of civil society meetings were organized by local community groups in over 134 cities around the world. The declarations, papers, essays, personal statements, findings and proposals for action developed at those events were submitted to the Secretariat, and two significant reports were prepared. The first is a compilation of the results emerging from over 200 community meetings; the second, entitled "A Family in the Third Millennium", provides an initial look at more than 2,000 pages of scholarship, research and academic findings collected during preparatory proceedings.

Her Highness Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al-Misnad, Consort of His Highness the Emir of Qatar and President of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs, delivered the opening plenary address of the Conference. Her Highness acknowledged the important role of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in focusing the world's attention on the family. She stressed the need to strengthen the family at the start of the new millennium and announced the establishment of an international institute for the study of the family.

The plenary meeting of the Doha Conference included remarks by Mr. Ibrahim Gambari, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Africa. Subsequent topical meetings of the Conference addressed such major questions as the family in the third millennium, the legal and religious foundations for the family in the third millennium, the family and education and the family and social dialogue.

During the Conference, the Doha Declaration was negotiated by an intergovernmental negotiating committee composed of representatives from Governments around the world. The balanced and careful language of the Doha Declaration was finalized after thorough consideration of all the views presented.

The Doha Declaration reaffirms the commitment of the international community to the family, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other United Nations documents. Its opening paragraphs review the goals and objectives of the tenth anniversary observance of the International Year of the Family and recall the preparatory process of the Doha International

Conference for the Family. The operative paragraphs reaffirm international commitments to the family and call for appropriate action to implement those commitments.

The Doha International Conference for the Family encouraged a broad range of partners to consider how best to provide the family with protection by society and State, as guaranteed under article 16 (3) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Conference energized representatives of Governments and non-governmental organizations and members of civil society to take action to realize the promise of the Universal Declaration.

The State of Qatar is honoured to have hosted the Doha International Conference for the Family. It will take affirmative steps not only to achieve the objectives of the tenth anniversary celebration, but also to implement the promises of the international community to the family, as contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, among other documents. The first "Call for Action" contained in the Doha Declaration urges the development of programmes to stimulate and encourage dialogue among countries, religions, cultures and civilizations on questions related to the family. The State of Qatar will take concrete steps to meet the objectives of the first "Call for Action".

At the concluding session of the Conference, Her Highness Sheikha Mozah reaffirmed the State of Qatar's commitment, announced during the opening plenary session, to establish an international institute for study of the family, to be dedicated to researching, supporting and implementing the Doha Declaration.

The tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family provides an opportunity to hope that by protecting and promoting the family, the world can create the just, stable and secure societies it so sorely needs. The family, as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims, is indeed the "natural and fundamental group unit of society". The Doha International Conference for the Family has provided essential support to the family so that it and the world can thrive.

The Acting President: I give the floor to the Netherlands, who will speak on behalf of the European Union.

Mr. Van den Berg (Netherlands): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The candidate countries Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and Croatia, the countries of the stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Serbia and Montenegro, and the EFTA countries Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

Today we celebrate the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. It provides us with the opportunity to reiterate our recognition of the important role of families in society. The EU continues to support the implementation of the Copenhagen summit and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly, pursuing the aim of eradicating poverty and promoting social development. We remain convinced that the objectives set forth in the context of these international forums provide a framework for the protection of the family as a key element in forging stronger and more coherent models for development throughout the world.

In celebrating this tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, the European Union reaffirms its commitment to such ideals and reiterates its support for cohesive policies, carried out on local and international levels, enhancing the condition of families throughout the world and embracing social inclusion as a means of eradicating poverty and discrimination.

In Copenhagen, we all agreed that there was continued recognition that the family is the basic unit of society and is a strong force of social cohesion and integration. In different cultural, political and social systems, various forms of the family exist. Although the family is the basic unit of society, its concept and composition have changed over the course of time, illustrating the fact that the family is a living, dynamic entity.

For instance, within the European Union, there has been a substantial increase in the number of single-person households, and there are projections that by the year 2025 such households will exceed 60 million and will represent almost a third of all family structures.

Every individual of full age has the right to found a family. It is not up to the State to impose limitations in that respect on the basis of race, nationality, religion, sexual orientation or any other status. While recalling that marriage should be entered into only with the free

and full consent of the intending spouses, the EU expresses concern with regard to the negative implications that may result from early marriages, in particular with reference to early child-bearing and maternal mortality.

In this context, the EU reaffirms its strong support for and commitment to the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development in its advancement of sexual and reproductive health and rights. Improving the ability of women and young people to choose when and how often to have children is the basis for creating strong families and protecting the health of both their families and of themselves.

We need to ensure the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all individual family members, including children. In that regard, the European Union would like to note the continued relevance of General Recommendation 21 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, concerning equality in marriage and family relations. One of the primary rights of family members is easy access to health and social services and to accurate, comprehensive information. That is particularly important when they have to handle issues related to the care of family members who are not self-sufficient. Focused health-care and home-care services can be of crucial importance when families have to take care of members with disabilities. Equally vital are childcare and home-care services, counselling and mediation services in dealing with separation or divorce.

A stable family is based on principles of equity, justice and individual fulfilment for each member. Each partner must, therefore, have the right to choose a profession or employment that is best suited to his or her abilities, qualifications and aspirations, as provided in article 11 (a) and (c) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

In that context, the European Union reaffirms its strong support for and commitment to the Beijing and Beijing + 5 agenda. We welcome the ten-year review of that agenda in 2005 as an opportunity to identify its gaps and challenges. That review should result in renewed inspiration and reinforce our joint efforts to advance the cause of gender equality and women's empowerment.

As for children, their best interests need to be one of our primary considerations. The role of families in the realization of children's rights is fundamental and cannot be underestimated. That is particularly important and urgent for families affected by HIV/AIDS. AIDS has already orphaned 14 million children worldwide — a number that is expected to exceed 25 million by 2010. More and more adolescent girls and grandmothers are becoming heads of household and they need increased support.

Families need to provide a safe environment, including care and protection, for children. The Convention on the Rights of the Child provides the international legal framework for the promotion and protection of children's rights. We therefore urge all States that have not yet done so, to become parties to the Convention of the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols.

Violence within the family occurs in every single country. That form of violence cannot, under any circumstance, be treated as a private matter. Domestic violence, including marital rape, needs to be criminalized. Child abuse and neglect need to be eradicated. In that regard, the European Union welcomes the progress report on the Secretary-General's study on violence against children, which has been compiled by Mr. Pinheiro, an independent expert to the Third Committee. We look forward to the report on an in-depth study on violence against women.

The European Union is deeply committed to family-related issues. As far back as August 1989, the European Commission published its first communiqué on family policies. That was followed by important actions, such as the 1996 Directive on Parental Leave. Some major areas addressed in those documents are: reconciling family and work life and improving the living conditions of vulnerable families, such as large low-income families, single parent families, jobless households, or families affected by domestic violence, alcoholism or sex abuse. In that regard, the European Union has focused on the risks and barriers that limit people's access to society. For example, growing up in a vulnerable family has come to be seen as a major factor in the intergenerational transmission of poverty and social exclusion.

The first draft joint report on social inclusion, which was adopted on 10 October 2001 in the form of a Commission communication to the Council, the

European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, singled out eight core challenges, ranging from the preservation of family solidarity to the protection of the rights of children, and identifies new ways of supporting families in order to prevent poverty and social exclusion while promoting equality between men and women.

The importance that the European Union attaches to the role of families is exemplified by the Conference on Families, Change and Social Policy in Europe organized by the Irish Presidency of the European Union, which took place in May 2004. The Conference focused on an exchange of ideas with a view toward more effectively supporting families throughout the European Union. At the invitation of the German Government, a conference of the European ministers for family affairs will take place in Berlin in December in order to discuss those challenges.

Mr. Mekdad (Syria), Vice President, took the Chair.

In order to implement policies that support families, the European Union strongly encourages the formation of partnerships involving all interested stakeholders at local, regional, national and international levels. In that spirit of cooperation, the European Union looks forward to related future discussions in the context of the United Nations, which should fully take into account the commitments made at the Copenhagen, Cairo, Beijing, Madrid and other relevant United Nations summits. Rather than focusing on ideologies, such discussions should focus on the implementation of those commitments and their impact on whole families, as well as on individual family members.

Ms. Latoundji Lauriano (Benin) (*spoke in French*): Allow me at the outset to sincerely congratulate the President on his election to the presidency of the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly of the United Nations. We would also like to thank him on behalf of the Government of Benin for his efforts to ensure the success of the work of the current session.

African ministers for the family, who met at the Regional Conference on the Family in Africa in Cotonou, Benin on 27 and 28 July 2004, entrusted my country, the Republic of Benin, with the mission of introducing the Plan of Action on the Family in Africa as Africa's contribution to the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. It is with true pleasure and a feeling of legitimate pride that from this rostrum I take the floor today, Monday, 6 December 2004, to participate in the commemorative ceremony of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family.

Africa is especially gratified by the fact that for decades now the United Nations, through its institutions and together with our respective States, has fought to gradually improve conditions in the social sphere.

That is why I would like, on behalf of the Government of Benin, as well as on my own behalf, respectfully and enthusiastically to recognize the hard work done by the bodies of the United Nations system and the African Union in preparing for the tenth anniversary commemoration of the International Year of the Family.

It was indeed felicitous that the General Assembly took the initiative, through its resolution 44/82 of 8 December 1989, of proclaiming 1994 to be the International Year of the Family. That initiative was taken with a view toward heightening the awareness of Governments, decision-makers and the general public about issues pertaining to the family, and was aimed at fostering activities in support of families.

The family has a vital role to play in sustainable development at the individual, community and national levels. For generations, particularly in Africa, it has been a bastion of strength, an anchor, a frame of reference and a source of identity for people. In the event of crisis — unemployment, illness, poverty, old age or distress — the majority of Africans rely on the family as the main source of material, social and emotional support and of social security.

The socio-economic environment in which families find themselves today has changed greatly, and profound structural, organizational and relational reforms are needed. Indeed, a decade after the institutionalization of the International Year of the Family, we must note that the family is more than ever before threatened with dislocation, given the combined negative effects of, inter alia, poverty, armed conflicts, poor governance, unemployment, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, insufficient social security mechanisms and depopulation.

According to a United Nations report, despite some achievements, many crucial issues remain unresolved,

and certain contrasts persist in the pro-family policies that have been adopted. The International Year of the Family has not led to the development of a long-term global action plan for families. The tenth anniversary was thus an opportunity to provide new impetus to the follow-up of the International Year of the Family.

Therefore, it was urgent that we think about and define effective strategies to save the family and to preserve its socializing, humanizing and fulfilling role. That is why we believe that the Maputo Summit, held in July 2003, was so important. On the eve of the tenth anniversary, it provided a new starting point in the process of defining a real policy aimed at strengthening family values.

Indeed, having perceived the danger looming in the future to what society holds most sacred, the heads of State, by adopting decision EX/CL/Dec.65 (III) at the third ordinary session of the Executive Council of the African Union, took a historic step by mandating the African Union Commission — with the support of partners of the great family of the United Nations system and of other strategic social partners — to draft a Plan of Action on the Family in Africa, which would be Africa's contribution to the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family.

The Plan takes into consideration our own cultural realities as well as global developments. It is a realistic and feasible Plan that will not be relegated to the dusty shelf of neglect or indifference; a relevant Plan of Action whose effective and efficient implementation will give a new face and renewed vitality to the African family; a Plan of Action that will be our basic law and our guide in restoring the family and its lofty position of dignity.

The draft of the Plan was studied by experts from all the countries members of the African Union on 8 and 9 March 2004 at its headquarters in Addis Ababa, during a meeting over which I had the honour to preside. My active participation in that meeting of highly qualified experts attested to the keen sense of responsibility of the Government of President Mathieu Kérékou, given the mission that the international community and the African continent, through the African Union, have entrusted to my country, Benin.

Validated at Cotonou in April 2004 during the second ordinary session of the African Union's Labour and Social Affairs Commission, the Plan was adopted by the heads of State at the African Union summit, held in Addis Ababa on 8 July 2004. It was finally launched on 27 July 2004 in Cotonou during the Regional Conference on the Family in Africa, which focused on strategies for the implementation, follow up and assessment of the Plan of Action on the Family in Africa.

The goal of the Plan of Action on the Family in Africa is to strengthen the family, to ensure that the needs of all families are taken into consideration and to improve families' well-being and living conditions. The Plan of Action should also serve as a guide for African Union member States in drafting, following up and assessing appropriate national pro-family policies and programmes. In short, it will be an instrument that each member State will implement, taking into consideration its own specific needs and sociological realities.

The Plan of Action on the Family in Africa highlights nine priority areas: reducing poverty; the right to social services; fighting the main causes of morbidity and mortality; rights, duties and responsibilities; the right to protection of the family; strengthening family relations; promoting protection of the environment; peace and security; and follow-up, assessment and monitoring. Sixteen objectives have been identified as a framework for implementation in those areas, and 47 strategies have been endorsed to ensure the implementation, follow-up and assessment of the Plan of Action.

At the Cotonou meeting in July, all African Union member States pledged to translate the Plan of Action into concrete and relevant actions and to make it their basic law with regard to rehabilitating the family unit, henceforth recognized as a special partner of the State. They also pledged to ensure that the document would receive particular attention from development financing institutions on the basis of the Millennium Development Goals, the New Partnership for Africa's Development and related national approaches described in poverty reduction strategy papers.

I cannot conclude without expressing, on behalf of the Government and people of Benin and all of Africa, our most heartfelt thanks to the United Nations, which, through General Assembly resolution 58/15 of 3 December 2003, agreed to Benin's request to organize a conference at the continental level in the context of observing the tenth anniversary of the

International Year of the Family. By doing so, it enabled my country to play a major role in celebrating the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family and in developing strategies for the implementation, follow-up and assessment of the Plan of Action on the Family in Africa.

The main task that we must still accomplish following the Cotonou meeting is to draft and implement the national plans of action on the family. Therefore, I would now like to request support from our various partners to finance the implementation of those documents.

Long live the International Year of the Family! Long live the Plan of Action on the Family in Africa! Long live international cooperation for effective and efficient implementation of the Plan of Action on the Family in Africa!

Mr. Abdul Ghafor (Brunei Darussalam): I have the honour of delivering this statement on behalf of the States members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN): Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam.

We in ASEAN would like to join others in extending our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his efforts on the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, including for his reports contained in documents E/CN.5/2004/3 and A/59/176. We also associate ourselves with the statement made by the representative of Qatar on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

The observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family is an opportunity to reaffirm the commitment made by United Nations Member States to enhance their action in incorporating effective family policies and programmes into their national development strategies. Our debate today is an important contribution to promoting issues related to the family by enhancing cooperation among Member States through an exchange of information and experiences.

In that regard, we would like to highlight some of our regional efforts to promote issues related to the family within the overall development of ASEAN. One of the common features of the peoples of our region has always been the strong family bond that is part of our societies, with families making important contributions to economic activities and social welfare. ASEAN is committed to strive for sustainable economic progress for all its members and realizes the important contribution of families to overall economic development.

Last week, during the tenth ASEAN Summit, held in Vientiane, Laos, ASEAN leaders reaffirmed their commitment on enhancing effective family policies and programmes as part of ASEAN members' national development strategies. The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Plan of Action was adopted, in which ASEAN members would be linked together in partnerships as a community of caring societies. The ASEAN socio-cultural community will also intensify cooperation in addressing family-related problems associated with population growth, education, unemployment and the prevention of infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS and SARS.

The ASEAN Work Programme on Social Welfare, Family and Population for 2003-2006 aims at assisting ASEAN members in achieving one of the objectives of ASEAN Vision 2020, in which families, as the basic units of society, tend to their family members, particularly children, youth, women and the elderly, and are capable of meeting new challenges arising from rapid social and economic change. The Work Programme identifies priorities for regional cooperation in social welfare and family and population, taking into account emerging challenges arising from demographic developments in the region and the implications of the changing structure of the family.

Many activities have been planned with specific objectives in mind. The Work Programme sets out activities designed to strengthen and intensify regional cooperation in enhancing the role of families, communities, civil society, the private sector and the Government in managing social problems, meeting human needs and maximizing opportunities for development. It also enhances ASEAN member States' capacity to anticipate and manage the social consequences of rapid demographic, political, social and economic change. The use of development and participatory approaches is important in helping the marginalized and disadvantaged to become independent and in facilitating their integration into society. The capacity of social welfare and social development ministries must also be enhanced in order to mainstream social concerns into the national development agenda.

In line with those strategies, important activities have already been undertaken by the relevant Government agencies in the region, such as strengthening capacities for carrying out social impact assessments, including an assessment of the impact of development on the institution of the family and policy research on the changing structure of the family.

Moreover, ASEAN is also in the process of developing joint approaches and sharing lessons learned in solving family and social problems as well as documenting effective policies and best practice cases for strengthening support for family care provision, including public policy for strengthening traditional family values.

We note the important work that has been done in the area of research on family-related issues. It provides an opportunity for further research work by all relevant organizations and bodies. We also note with appreciation the efforts of the United Nations and its related agencies in supporting Member States' promotion of family-specific activities and programmes and in supporting policy development.

It is important that cooperation among Member States, regional and international agencies and civil society groups be enhanced, in order to increase our capacity to manage the challenges related to the family. Through such cooperation, the international community will be closer to creating secure, just, free and harmonious societies offering opportunities and a higher standard of living for all.

Mr. Xie Bohua (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation subscribes to the statement made by the representative of Qatar on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and wishes to express its appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report on the observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family (A/59/176).

Since, at its forty-fourth session, the General Assembly proclaimed 1994 as the International Year of the Family, the theme of "Family: resources and responsibilities in a changing world" has become a topical concept in social development and an important item on the international agenda. That is a gratifying development.

The issue of the family is old and complex. It not only involves individual families, but also has a bearing upon social cohesion and stability, as well as an international dimension. As we mark the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, I would like to offer the following observations.

First, Governments must incorporate the family perspective into social development policies and programmes and deploy all resources, including laws, regulations and appropriate measures, to foster a stable, harmonious and caring environment and to protect the interests of the family and its individual members. Importance must be given to the family as the basic unit of society with a view to promoting an integrated, equitable and balanced development of the society.

Secondly, the international community must take measures to increase global awareness of the importance of the family. While the specific issues related to the family may differ from country to country, the pursuit of happiness, stability and harmony is an aspiration and an inherent right shared by all families in the world. Accordingly, the international community must take a broader view in formulating policies and taking measures on the basis of equality, solidarity and mutual respect to create an enabling international environment that facilitates national efforts for family stability and problem-solving.

The Chinese nation takes pride in its long history and its many good traditions. Already in ancient times, Chinese sages advocated the philosophy of family harmony leading to good government and, in turn, to universal peace. They argued for balance between state and family interests, reverence for the old and care for the young, and stressed family harmony and stability. Since the founding of the new China, the Government has sought to ensure family harmony and stability through legal protection, policy guidance and moral restraints. The saying that prosperity follows family harmony has been a motto for every family in China seeking happiness. The relevant Government agencies have sponsored a host of family-oriented activities, such as the five-virtues family award, family cultural and art festivals and projects aimed at promoting the civilized family.

To mark the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, a world summit on the family, jointly sponsored by China's National Population and Family Planning Committee and the World Family Organization, is being held today in the city of Sanya in China's Hainan Province. The summit is to

comprehensively review and assess the progress made since the proclamation of the International Year of the Family and to promote the realization of the Millennium Development Goals from a family perspective. We hope the summit will yield positive results and be crowned with success.

Mr. Mabhongo (South Africa): My delegation associates itself with the statement made by the delegation of Qatar on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. South Africa had the honour to take part in the development of the Plan of Action on the Family in Africa during the meeting held in Cotonou, Benin. We therefore support the Plan of Action on the Family in Africa, as presented this morning by Minister Lauriano of Benin. We are therefore also pleased to participate in this celebration of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family.

The South African Government used this anniversary to promote the family and to announce policy and programme changes specifically aimed at strengthening the family. As part of our celebrations of the International Year, our Government, through the Minister of Social Development, Mr. Zola Skweyiya, released a plan of action for the International Year of the Family and beyond which is aimed at integrating service delivery to families.

The family is recognized throughout humanity as an important and basic element of social existence. In South Africa, we regard the family not only as a potentially powerful agent for political, economic, cultural and social change, but also as a potent vehicle for the care, protection and development of its members. However, factors such as poverty, unemployment, HIV/AIDS, domestic violence, crime and the disintegration of family life are some of the difficulties that South African families experience. The disintegration of family life in particular impacts negatively on the well-being of family members and can lead to moral decay, thus affecting the very fibre of society. Furthermore, it is widely acknowledged that all South African families have been affected by the social, political and economic conditions of colonization, apartheid and urbanization.

As a result of those phenomena, family members have traditionally moved away from their homes to find employment and economic opportunities elsewhere. These and other social changes have led to an increase in non-traditional family forms such as single parenthood, childless marriages, reconstituted and blended family forms and the general fragmentation of families.

These conditions and trends and the desire to accelerate the improvement of the quality of life for all have made the family, from the South African perspective, an important and critical developmental entity. In this regard, South Africa is focusing on prioritizing, among other things, on the rebuilding of families, communities and social relationships, as well as on the restoration of the ethics of care and human development in all welfare programmes.

South Africa's social welfare policy recognizes the need to preserve the family as a unit in which children are raised to be healthy and which would promote the full integration of women and other vulnerable groups into the economy. Besides welfare and social security services, my Government provides a range of other services to individual members of families, to groups of families and to communities, in line with our Constitution and with the aim of promoting a good quality of life for all people.

In the past 10 years, nearly half a million households in South Africa have benefited through a national food emergency scheme, which is part of an integrated approach to eradicate food shortages and food insecurity. In the past year poverty relief projects have benefited a large number of South African women. The projects focus on building self-reliant communities and a culture of sustainable development. The majority of the poverty relief projects are rurally based.

Ongoing support is also provided to child-headed households, orphaned children and children affected by HIV/AIDS. Through partnerships with faith-based and other civil society organizations, the number of children living in poverty who benefit from the child support grant has substantially increased.

It is important that the principles that guided the United Nations to proclaim the International Year of the Family be commemorated. Measures will also be needed to ensure that appropriate evaluation of progress is made and that obstacles encountered both prior to and during the International Year of the Family are addressed in order to ensure its success and adequate follow-up.

South Africa is committed to strengthening and preserving families within communities for a better life

for all, especially for children. It is important to note that while progress has been made, the integration of plans to improve on present services and to address gaps in respect of families remains a critical objective.

In that regard, South Africa is currently in the process of finalizing a comprehensive policy on families, the aim of which is to facilitate and guide integrated service delivery to families at the provincial and local government levels. This policy will be launched in March 2005 at the International Conference on Families, to be held in South Africa. The Conference will seek to increase awareness among all national and international stakeholders on the importance and centrality of the family as a basic unit of society. It will also seek to create awareness of the family's centrality in all sustainable development strategies. The Conference will further promote an understanding of the effects of the different political, environmental, sociocultural and economic conditions facing families in South Africa.

Mr. Moeini Meybodi (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the outset, I would like to associate my delegation with the statement made by Qatar on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report.

The observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family by the General Assembly provides us with an excellent opportunity to evaluate the achievements made thus far in implementing the objectives set for this great occasion. Today's meeting also underscores the importance of the institution of the family for the international community. Clearly, the attainment of these objectives depends on our individual and collective fulfilment of our commitments towards the strengthening and the consolidation of this basic foundation of all societies. Indeed, we have gathered here today to renew our commitments to that end.

The various General Assembly resolutions on the issue of family contain a variety of policy recommendations and actions to be implemented by Governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and other relevant stakeholders. We therefore need to assess carefully and vigilantly our policies and actions taken in line with the Assembly's recommendations, particularly in areas such as strengthening the capacity of national institutions to formulate, implement and monitor family-related policies; strengthening and supporting the institution of the family in performing its societal and developmental functions; effectively addressing the needs of families in the era of globalization; and enhancing cooperation and coordination in strengthening and integrating the family perspective in the work of international organizations, including the United Nations system. A proper, factual assessment of the present situation helps us to better understand the extent to which our actions and practices have furthered the goals set by the General Assembly.

Undoubtedly, the General Assembly's continuous and persistent attention to the issue of the family, at least since 1989, has raised global awareness of the contribution of the family to the sustainable social, economic and cultural development of societies. The Assembly's work on the agenda item on the family has also highlighted the numerous challenges that families, as well as countries and the international community, all face, such as the integration of family policies in the strategic planning for our countries, the rights of individual members of the family, the reconciliation of family responsibilities with work and the socio-economic well-being of the family.

Since the adoption of the General Assembly resolution on the International Year of Family, various initiatives and activities have been undertaken at the national, regional and global levels with a view to giving the institution of the family greater recognition and, consequently, promoting and strengthening its status worldwide. In that context, the conference held in Doha last week was an important and useful initiative. In fact, such initiatives and efforts have not only brought further recognition of the family's important role in maintaining the stability and sustainability of human society but have also underlined the need to strengthen and protect that basic unit of society and to address the challenges that families are grappling with.

Many of the recommendations contained in various United Nations resolutions have long been implemented in Iran, as a result of the solid legal and cultural foundations that have constantly and progressively preserved the tranquillity and the socio-economic stability of the family all over the country. In that regard, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in pursuing the teachings of Islam and its cultural values and in fulfilling its international obligations, is fully committed to continuing its efforts to ensure the

necessary protection of the institution of the family and its members.

Some of the concrete measures undertaken by the relevant authorities and stakeholders in Iran include integrating the family perspective into the five-year national development plans and, accordingly, allocating the necessary budget resources for the protection and the promotion of families; providing grants and loans with preferential terms to needy families, especially to female-headed families; providing public health services to low-income families, especially in rural areas; and establishing consultative centres at the local and national levels to provide advice to those in need. Those consultative services are basically demand-oriented and are provided for various family-related issues such as health, education, employment and family planning. The services are usually provided free of charge by the Government, civil society or non-governmental organizations.

Other such measures include the provision of the necessary social security and protection to women and girls, as they are the most vulnerable groups of society. In addition, orphans and widows are protected, as are mothers, especially during pregnancy. There is extensive investment in the education and health sectors, paying particular attention to women and girls, especially in rural areas. The role of pro-family non-governmental organizations is promoted, as is the participation of civil society and academic and research institutions in designing and implementing family-related policies and programmes aimed at strengthening and maintaining the integrity and the well-being of families.

The Government formulates, amends and updates the relevant regulations, laws and executive orders intended to provide further protection and ensure the rights of children and women with respect to violence and abuse. Public organizations have established arrangements and mechanisms providing a variety of facilities and services for the protection of the family and its integrity. Various committees and working groups have been established in several branches of the Government to deal with specific problems that female family members may face, such as violence, unemployment, old age, drugs, abuse and HIV/AIDS.

Despite extensive efforts at the national and international levels, much remains to be done to create an enabling environment for strengthening and protecting the institution of the family. Many families across the globe are still suffering from poverty, exclusion, discrimination and oppression. Our common responsibility as human beings requires us to make every effort to alleviate that suffering and create the conditions conducive to making prosperous families.

It is our strong belief that the family, which is the result of the union between a man and a woman, should enjoy the broadest protection and assistance from Governments and the international community. The concept of the family may be interpreted differently in different cultures and legal systems, and we are aware that a consensus has yet to be reached among the Member States of the Organization on a single definition of the family. However, such a situation should not place a hurdle in the way of our collective endeavours to enhance the safety and the integrity of our societies by creating and preserving sound and healthy families. In our view, the lack of common understanding on the definition of the family is not a major global problem requiring this world body to depart from its traditional practice relating to the issue of the family.

Moreover, the United Nations system in general, and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in particular, needs to further strengthen its activities by, inter alia, integrating the family perspective in the work of its funds, programmes and agencies. The United Nations should also follow up and effectively monitor implementation by all Member States of its various resolutions on the family. In doing so, it needs to adequately address the adverse consequences of calamities such as poverty, drugs, unemployment, natural disasters and conflicts on the stability and the sustainability of families in different countries. That mission cannot be accomplished without the active involvement of various commissions and institutions of the United Nations. In that context, the role of the Commission for Social Development is pivotal in taking an integrated approach to the question of the family and its needs. We therefore support the idea of maintaining the family as a standing item on the Commission's agenda.

It is imperative for all of us as Members of this world Organization to continue our efforts to protect and enhance the stature and the dignity of the family in our communities. We all share the view that the institution of the family is the basic unit of every

society and that a safe and healthy environment for it contributes greatly to social and economic development and the stability of the society. Indeed, a sound society is composed of sound families. Thus, we should all strive to strengthen and protect the institution of the family, as it is a primary and effective vehicle for the promotion of fair, just and peaceful relations among all members of the global community.

Mr. López Clemente (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): First, we would like to welcome the convening of this event in the General Assembly. Meetings such as today's devoted to the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family show that the United Nations should continue to be the main forum in which concerted work is done at the international level on all items related to the social development of our countries.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, one of the benchmarks for most of the international commitments adopted to make our world a better place, states:

> "The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State."

It was later recognized that the family assumes various forms and functions as a result of the diversity of cultures and societies coexisting on earth.

Nothing can be more relevant, in the complex circumstances that have been created by neo-liberal globalization, than to recall the role of the family and the assistance and protection that it requires from the State. The results of various studies on the family indicate that there is a change in dynamics of the structure of the family. It is growing smaller in number of members. The studies assess the impact on families of the growing number of elderly people, migration and major pandemics such as HIV/AIDS.

The framing of family policies should envisage all general aspects in order to ensure that there is real protection and assistance given to this basic nucleus of society. Other elements should be considered if one really wants to support the institution we know as the family.

Any effort taken by Governments, particularly in the third world, devoted to promoting well-being for all families, will be in vain if the conditions of the unjust international order that currently exists are not changed. Accordingly, 20 per cent of the population in developed countries consume 86 per cent of what is produced. Eighty per cent are fighting poverty and have diminished opportunities. 1.2 billion persons throughout the world are living in extreme poverty. 800 million persons are going hungry. More than 115 million children have no access to education, and there are 876 million illiterates throughout the world.

In such circumstances, how would it be possible to strengthen the family if many of them do not even have access to basic health and education services. Meanwhile, their members watch, powerless, as more than 10 million children die each year from preventable disease. More than 500,000 women die during pregnancy and labour and 42 million are sick with AIDS. Malaria takes a million victims per year and a billion people lack access to safe drinking water and 2,400 million individuals have no health services. The crushing external debt steals resources that are desperately needed to finance the policies to support and protect families.

In 2003 alone, creditors received $436 billion. This exorbitant figure contrasts with $68.4 billion distributed as official development assistance. As a matter of urgency, measures must be taken to change the picture. This situation is simply unsustainable.

The Cuban Government has always been involved in continuously seeking resources, alternatives and solutions to economic and social problems in order to guarantee basic services and empower various sectors of society by means of just policies that encourage participation and offer equal opportunities and access. The economic and social policies that have always characterized our Cuban revolutionary project have been in keeping with the aspirations and objectives of equity and justice that we seek for our entire population.

Such policies are being continued, despite over 45 years of American hostility, one of the worst examples of which was the genocidal unilateral blockade imposed upon our people, reinforced by new measures that were adopted by the Government of the United States on 6 May and put into practice on 30 June 2004. The boundless obsession to overthrow the Cuban revolution has led the American Administration to arrogate to itself the inconceivable power of redefining the scope and confines of the Cuban family, restricting it to grandparents, nieces and

nephews, parents, brothers and sisters, spouses and children. In other words, in accordance with this narrow concept, now an aunt, a cousin or any other relative is no longer a part of the family of Cubans who reside in the United States.

Under the newly set limitations, relatives' remittances can only be sent to that category of relatives, and all Cubans living in the United States who send medication, money or any other kind of articles to uncles, cousins or other categories of relatives or close friends in Cuba will be subject to penalties. The same is happening with the restriction of family visits to one visit every three years and then only with the express authorization of the Department of the Treasury, if it agrees that there are humanitarian grounds justifying such family contact.

The World Summit on Social Development, held in Copenhagen in 1995, reaffirmed in paragraph 80 of its Programme of Action that "The family is the basic unit of society and as such should be strengthened". What is more, it acknowledged: "In different cultural, political and social systems, various forms of the family exists." The American Administration, in its desire to damage the Cuban nation, is trying to deny the identity of Cuban families, and is rejecting their inclusion in the categories of relationship that traditionally have been intrinsic and inalienable to this basic unit of the Cuban people.

Every effort to debase the Cuban people will be useless. The results speak for themselves. Cuba has a literacy level of 99.8 per cent. A hundred per cent of the Cuban population has free access to high-quality health services. The infantile mortality rate has been reduced to 6 per thousand live births. All children are protected against 13 preventable diseases. More than 95 per cent of the country receives electricity and 80 per cent of the rural population has access to safe drinking water. Sixty-five per cent of our current expenditures in budgeted activities are devoted to providing universal access to education and health services, to promoting national culture and to ensuring social security and social assistance, which cover the entire Cuban population.

As we celebrate the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, our delegation would like to thank the Government of the State of Qatar for having organized the International Conference on the Family in Doha. Events such as this will contribute to greater international cooperation in social development and protecting and assisting the broad range of families throughout the world. Cuba would like to avail itself of this opportunity to reiterate its commitment to ensure that there will be genuine constructive international cooperation in this connection.

This is highly important in order to build societies that are more just for all. It is only through lower arms expenditures, sincere international cooperation, true tolerance and full respect for the diversity of cultures and political and social systems, that it will be possible for our families to find a world better for them and for coming generations.

Ms. Al Haj Ali (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): First, I have the honour of supporting the statement made by the representative of Qatar on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The General Assembly's commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family shows the importance of the family as a fundamental and natural unit of society that benefits from the protection of society and the State, and also the importance of the family in economic and social development throughout the world.

For many centuries, the family has played an important role as a social institution for the consolidation of the social fabric of society during times of peace, war and crises, as well as epidemics or natural disasters. Syria believes that the family is culturally, religiously and historically the core unit of society and for that reason believes that it must be supported and protected.

The family is a top priority for my country, and plans and legislation adopted at the national level are aimed at strengthening the status and position of the Syrian family and at protecting it in the face of modern challenges. We have therefore established an independent governmental body that deals with family affairs, in order to promote the family, such that the family would be better able to participate in human development.

Within the framework of the observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, we would like to mention the efforts already made and the ongoing efforts by our Organization in this area. The relevant Syrian body for the family has cooperated with other civil society organizations to heighten awareness of the anniversary year, including

an awareness campaign concerning problems of the Syrian family. We have published brochures on the family and have focused in particular, on supporting and protecting issues relating to women and children. The purpose of that campaign is to strengthen and advance the Syrian family.

The challenges facing families in our region are in no way confined to the problems of globalization or insufficiencies in the areas of socio-economic development, as is the case in many developing countries. There are many more problems, because many Arab families are feeling the repercussions of the Israeli occupation of Arab territories. For that reason, we must not forget the conditions and the suffering of families as a result of armed conflicts and foreign occupation, as we celebrate this day.

Therefore, my delegation would like to reaffirm the need for the international community to support all families suffering from foreign occupation, as well as from situations of armed conflict.

Finally, my delegation would like to congratulate Qatar, for having hosted the Doha International Conference for the Family. That was a successful conference — as a regional and international preparatory conference to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family — and was crowned by the adoption of the Doha Declaration, which advances the humanitarian mission of protecting and building families beneficial to society.

Mr. Kazykhanov (Kazakhstan): Allow me, on behalf of the delegation of Kazakhstan, to express appreciation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report on preparations for and observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2004. The report contains valuable information on the situation of families worldwide that can be used by Governments of Member States in their family policies.

For the last 10 years and since the observance of the International Year of the Family, a lot of attention has been focused on family policies. Throughout the world the family continues to be the primary means for people to live together and to provide mutual nurturing and support. As an integral part of the life of every human being, the family makes an enormous contribution to the eradication of poverty and the creation of just, stable and secure societies.

Fully endorsing the General Assembly's decision to observe the International Year of the Family and other initiatives and longer-term actions to support families around the world, we note the importance of the adopted decisions for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and for the development of societies in general.

It will not be possible to strengthen the family as an institution without results-oriented social policies and the drafting of appropriate national programmes. Family protection constitutes an integral element of Kazakhstan's social policy and seeks to reach the main objective of development — to provide to all people an opportunity to live long lives with dignity.

The dominance of the principle of full solidarity and a high level of State intervention characterize our country's system of social protection. There are 34 types of social payments, benefits and relief provided to different categories of the population from the State and local budgets.

In recognition of the need to develop socially and family-oriented legislation, the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan establishes the concept of the family and the elements of its protection. Those fundamental provisions of the Constitution are further developed in the law on marriage and the family, the law on health protection, the law on education, the law on employment and the law on the reproductive rights of citizens and guarantees of their enjoyment, and in a number of other legislative and regulatory acts that establish and govern family and marriage relations.

State policies in that area cannot be meaningful without guarantees of the child's right to live in a family and develop fully in a friendly environment. In that context, a number of laws on education, the protection of the rights of the child and child health care have been adopted in the country.

The adoption of the law on social, medical and educational help to children with limited abilities has greatly facilitated the efforts to address problems relating to the social protection of children with disabilities.

As an additional measure of social support to the family, a draft law on State benefits to families with children has been prepared. It provides for the introduction of allowances for children from low-income families. It also provides for an increase in the

amount of benefits if there are two or more children. An analysis of the legislative acts on issues affecting families, women and children leads to the conclusion that Kazakhstan has established a solid legal foundation to address those issues.

During the years of our independent development, considerable constructive work has been carried out to radically reform the political system and all social and economic relations in the country and to integrate Kazakhstan into the world community. In 1998, by presidential decree, a National Commission on Family and Women was established under the President to coordinate the work of State bodies to protect the rights of women and to strengthen the family as a social institution.

A caucus called "Otybasy" — "family" — composed of 33 deputies was created in the National Parliament, on the initiative of the National Commission, to protect the interests of families, women and children at the legislative level.

To achieve real equality between men and women in all spheres of life, the National Commission has, for the first time ever, elaborated and adopted a Gender Policy Programme in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The establishment of the office of the Human Rights Ombudsman in Kazakhstan has had a positive effect on human rights protection in our country.

When we talk about social security in Kazakhstan, we have to mention the pension system, which occupies a special place in the welfare system. On 1 January 1998, Kazakhstan introduced the system of individual retirement accounts in accumulative pension funds. Today, the indicators for the accumulative pension system reflect a positive trend in the development of the system.

Efforts to improve the situation of disabled persons represent another important track in the country's social policy. Currently, the State provides welfare services to some 400,000 disabled persons, or three per cent of the population, most of whom have limited opportunities to work or to enjoy the same conditions for income generation as other citizens.

Rehabilitation and integration of disabled persons into society take place in accordance with the country's law on social protection of persons with disabilities and the programme for the rehabilitation of disabled persons for 2002-2005, approved by Government decree. The purpose of the programme is to establish a financially viable, efficient and socially just three-pillar system of social security, where responsibility for social security is shared by the State, employers and employees.

We believe that the actions being taken will enable us to increase the income level of the population, which, in turn, will promote further social and economic development in Kazakhstan.

In expressing appreciation to the United Nations for organizing this event, we would like to point out that such meetings give us an opportunity to make a realistic assessment of the progress achieved so far and to identify new ways of addressing issues related to the strengthening of the family as an institution and the improvement of the world social situation.

We hope that the Governments of the United Nations Member States and organizations of the United Nations system will redouble their efforts in the area of the family, for the sake of future generations around the world.

Mrs. Ahmed (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, my delegation would like to add its voice to the statement made by the delegation of Qatar on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

My delegation wishes to express its pleasure at participating in the General Assembly's observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, culminating the numerous activities undertaken over the past decade at all levels aimed at celebrating this important occasion throughout the world. This celebration embodies United Nations endorsement of the norms and precepts accepted since the establishment of the Organization through the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which stipulates that the family is the basic unit of society and, as such, must be accorded support and protection from society and State.

Today's commemoration reiterates the special status accorded to the institution of the family in different societies since humanity began. The family has been cherished by divine religions and noble faiths, given its irreplaceable and natural role in bringing up children and inculcating fundamental sound principles for forthcoming generations so that they may serve as an active and effective nucleus contributing to the building of nations.

We would also like to express our appreciation for the report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/59/176, as well as the numerous studies and reports undertaken by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat to commemorate this anniversary. The reports have contributed to raising awareness of family-related matters. The Secretary-General's report emphasizes that the family has a continuous and vital role to play in social and human development. Families still contribute to a great extent to reforming socio-economic conditions and to achieving the goals set out by major United Nations summits and conferences over the past decade, including the Millennium Development Goals.

In this connection, we would like to state that, while supporting and promoting the role of families, Governments must provide assistance to men and women so that they can reconcile productive work and family responsibilities in the light of contemporary conditions. Along the same lines, we support the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General, particularly those recommendations that relate to spurring scholarly and academic research to conduct studies on the influential social factors affecting the family and its role in society in integrating family affairs into the development process, in fostering international cooperation, and in extending technical assistance to the relevant national machinery.

At the national level and in observance of this occasion, the Minister for Social Affairs of Sudan issued a resolution last year to set up a commission to prepare for the tenth anniversary consisting of official institutions, academic institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The commission's task is to prepare for the celebrations and to achieve four main objectives. The first objective is the elaboration of national family policies. The second is the protection of the family from the repercussions of globalization. The third is to build a family-related database. And the fourth is to empower the family and enhance its role.

A celebration took place on 4 and 5 December with the theme of "Stable and Effective Family in a Changing World". This event was implemented at the federal level; programmes and goals of the tenth anniversary have also been implemented at the level of the provinces, with the participation of various parties, official bodies and civil society organizations.

In this regard, Sudan participated with representatives and NGOs at an Arab meeting held in October 2003 in Lebanon and a regional conference on family held in Cotonou, in July 2004.

It also participated in the Arab regional meeting on the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in Jordan in October 2004 and the Doha International Conference for the Family, held on 29 and 30 November 2004, which adopted the Doha Declaration, which in turn constitutes an important turning point in charting family-related policies and strategies in the framework of the United Nations and through the exchange by States of experience and expertise in that connection. For those reasons, we would like to express our appreciation to the Government of Qatar for hosting that important Conference.

In conclusion, my delegation is of the view that the impetus generated today by this celebration will help pave the way for the implementation of the goals of the International Year of the Family in the field. We should build on this momentum in preparing for the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in a manner that reaffirms the role of the family in the socio-economic development of all societies, especially in the developing countries.

Mr. Horn (United States of America): I wish at the outset to express my gratitude for the privilege of addressing this body today. It is indeed an honour.

Ten years ago, the General Assembly proclaimed the International Year of the Family. In celebration of this tenth anniversary, I should like to spend my time this morning providing an overview of how Americans view the role of the State in relationship to the family and how those principles guide family policy in the United States.

The United States Census Bureau defines a family as "two or more persons related by birth, marriage or adoption who reside in the same household". Of course, this definition cannot begin to capture the richness of family life, for family life is really about things such as celebrating anniversaries, caring for an elderly parent and tucking one's children into bed at night.

Still, discussing family life is not simply an appeal to sentiment. Throughout the ages, political philosophers, social historians and civic and religious

leaders have praised the family as the foundation of the social order, the bedrock of nations and the bastion of civilization.

Cicero, for example, spoke of the family as the first society and the seabed of the State. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights describes the family as "the natural and fundamental group unit of society". The fact is that the family is a universal and irreplaceable community rooted in human nature and the basis of all societies at all times. As the cradle of life and love for each new generation, the family is the primary source of personal identity, self-esteem and support for children. It is also the first and foremost school of life, uniquely suited to teaching children integrity, character, morals, responsibility, service and wisdom.

As the 1994 United Nations Programme for the International Year of the Family states, the family provides "the natural framework for the emotional, financial and material support essential to the growth and development of their members" (*A/CONF.171/4, para. 67*), particularly infants and children. The family remains a vital means of preserving and transmitting cultural values.

These roles of transmitting culture and socializing children make the family indispensable to civil society as families transform helpless, dependent babies into responsible, independent adults. Thus it is easy to understand why President George W. Bush has said that the character of a nation begins in the home.

Given the importance of families to society, does the State have any role in supporting the family? We believe that the answer is "yes". We believe that government, within appropriate limits, should work to support and strengthen families by respecting the prerogatives of families, encouraging healthy marriages and supporting all families that need assistance.

To support families effectively, however, government must first recognize that families exist apart from the State. The United States Declaration of Independence states that all human beings are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights — in other words, rights that predate the State. The State must recognize and acknowledge those rights and respect the family for what it is as a matter of natural law. The State's foremost obligation, therefore, is to respect, defend and protect the family as an institution. As President Bush has said, government must honour the family.

Given that understanding of the relationship between the State and the family, what, then, are the principles that should guide family policy in America?

First, we believe that government ought to create the conditions that allow strong and healthy families to thrive. Consistent with paragraph 1 of article 25 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights that "Everyone has a right to a standard of living for the health and well-being of himself and of his family", we believe that government ought to keep the tax burden on families as low as possible. We also believe that government ought to create the conditions whereby it is not necessary for both parents to be in the paid labour force in order to provide an adequate household income. Although government policy should remain neutral as to whether two parents or only one are in the workplace, and, if the latter, which parent works outside the home, government policy, we believe, should be aimed at providing parents the option to split their roles and functions in the family, if they so choose.

Secondly, we believe that Government should recognize the unique and irreplaceable contributions of both mothers and fathers to the lives of their children. Research has shown that mothers and fathers on average tend to parent differently in some important ways, offering their children unique skills and gifts. Thus American family policy seeks to strengthen the bond connecting fathers to their children while also supporting the role of motherhood as an esteemed and respected institution in society.

Thirdly, we believe that public policy ought to strengthen healthy marriages, and, where possible, the two-parent family. Research consistently shows that healthy marriages benefit children, adults and society, whereas dysfunctional marriages do not. Hence in America government seeks to promote healthy marriages, not marriage at any cost.

Fourthly, we believe that government policy should recognize that every child has dignity and worth and, as such, ought to support all children and families. Even if government policy does what it can to strengthen healthy marriages, some children will grow up in other situations. Research indicates that those children tend to face increased risks for negative outcomes. The State should therefore offer a variety of

tangible social services to families in need, including cash assistance, food assistance and health care, to help ensure that all families have a minimum standard of living.

While providing a safety net for vulnerable families and children is unquestionably important, there are limits to government intervention. Social services cannot replace the natural human relationships that are ideal for children's development. Social services can only supplement what children need most: the love and attention of their mother and father.

During his first year in office, President Bush highlighted his commitment to the family when he said:

> "My Administration is committed to strengthening the American family. Many one-parent families are also a source of comfort and reassurance. Yet a family with a mom and a dad who are committed to marriage and devote themselves to their children helps provide children a sound foundation for success. Government can support families by promoting policies that help strengthen the institution of marriage and help parents rear their children in positive and healthy environments."

Government policy is limited in what it can do to strengthen families. But what it can do, it ought to do.

As we move beyond this year's tenth anniversary celebrations, Governments ought to honour and support the family as the most critical structure for ensuring the well-being of children, who are, after all, our future.

Mrs. Wahab (Indonesia): On behalf of the delegation of Indonesia, let me thank the Secretary-General for his detailed report on preparations for and observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family (A/59/176), which is now being discussed at this plenary meeting. It is a rich document that allows us to assess national priorities and actions to protect and strengthen families.

I take this opportunity to associate my delegation with the statements made by the representative of Qatar on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and the representative of Brunei Darussalam on behalf of the Association of South-East Asian Nations.

The advice contained in the Secretary-General's report that each country should determine for itself the way in which major trends affect its particular circumstances is acceptable to Indonesia. We also welcome the light the report sheds on approaches and policies undertaken to deal with dysfunctional situations affecting all types of families. In essence, Indonesia regards the report as an important record of steps taken so far and as a statement on what needs to be done to secure the future of families.

For its part, Indonesia remains committed to the ideals of the International Year of the Family because we recognize that the family is at the very centre of human existence. Strong families not only contribute to the good order of society but also represent an untapped contributor to society's economic and social development. To play the diverse roles of which it is capable, the family must therefore benefit from the widest possible protection and assistance to build its capacity for action.

Without such support, family life would risk disintegration, and there is clear evidence that the result would most probably be various forms of anti-social behaviour. Dysfunctional families put communities under stress and place great strain on the social infrastructure of nations. Indonesia believes that such a negative social situation is to be avoided at all costs. Consequently, Indonesia's national ideal is a well-integrated, prosperous family, and towards that end Indonesia has placed the family at the centre of its policy-making process.

As the family is the fundamental unit of society, Indonesia believes that the purpose of national policies and programmes for families should result in individual and group empowerment. Because women have historically had to cope with innumerable constraints, special emphasis is being given to their development. Since they also represent the nucleus of family life, it is vital that they be equipped to handle the important responsibilities that underlie successful family life.

Indonesia has therefore put into effect a policy — "Quality, Community and Family 2015" — that aims to build family resilience and enhance the capacity of women to respond effectively to the basic needs of their families. Through that policy women are gaining the means to help provide their families with food, health care, education and shelter and are now themselves the beneficiaries of increased educational opportunities.

The close attention being paid to women does not mean, however, that men have been overlooked. The broad-based nature of the national programme of action also impacts men. They are being mobilized and encouraged to become more involved in building strong, happy, prosperous families, since the success of the family does not depend only on the efforts and inputs of women. In addition to satisfying the basic material needs of the family, men also have an important role to play in meeting the intellectual, emotional and spiritual needs of their offspring.

The partnership of husband and wife must address not only the functions of reproduction and production, but also incorporate the critically important function of socialization. Proper child-rearing and the creation of conditions for the wholesome development of children must be treated as shared responsibilities.

Together, the husband and wife team must create a happy, loving, nurturing home environment for their children. Together, they must create the value system that will give their children a strong religious and moral education and guide their actions in the wider society. Those values should inspire confidence and boldness but should not create an orientation for domestic violence.

On the whole, Indonesia has made notable progress in improving the quality of life enjoyed by its families. But we recognize there must be a permanent commitment at the highest level of government to the goals of the International Year of the Family in order to maintain a high quality of life and to improve it in the future. We shall therefore continue to build strong partnerships and cooperate with all relevant parties, regionally and internationally, to ensure better conditions of life for families. In that regard, we warmly welcome the convening of the Doha International Conference for the Family and its Doha Declaration.

Mr. Briz Gutiérrez (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation would like to associate itself with the statement made by Qatar on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

For Guatemala, the family is the basic unit of society and as such should receive the greatest protection, assistance and support in any social and cultural policy. For the family is the nucleus within which the development of the human being — the owner of the future — takes place.

Guatemala's presence at this important meeting shows the commitment of the Government to the family as the natural and necessary instrument for bringing forth and nurturing human life. The Constitution of the Republic establishes the protection and promotion of the family and the State guarantees that obligation and further declares that it is in the interest of society to take action against the causes of family disintegration.

As a result of commitments assumed at the World Summit for Children and of our ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Guatemala established a programme of community homes, under the First Lady's Secretariat of Social Work. This programme is a Government strategy to contribute to the fight against poverty, to prevent and minimize the problem posed by street children and to provide protection and assistance to abandoned or destitute children.

It cannot be denied that in all parts of the world, changes in the structure of the family have accelerated over the past decade. However, as the primary and central component of society, the family nevertheless continues to be the centre of every activity of the human being, both privately and in the social sphere. For that reason, its protection, proper functioning and well-being are of concern to society as a whole.

We agree with the Secretary-General that in the integration of matters concerning the family, the State plays the principal role. It is the entity called upon to implement important domestic policies and programmes that protect the family and advance its organization on the basis of an institution that tends towards equality of rights and obligations of the couple, responsible parenthood and mutual assistance within the home.

For many years, Guatemala has undertaken a variety of scattered, albeit urgent efforts to tackle the various social phenomena that adversely affect our families and our population as a whole. We note with concern that despite those efforts, there are still families that struggle daily to obtain food and dignified and adequately paid employment. There are other economic and cultural factors that are detrimental to the development of the human being.

There are many challenges that today's family faces, including the exploitation of children, inadequate education for children, drug addiction and

alcoholism, the devastating effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, infectious diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis, armed conflicts, natural disasters and extreme weather conditions — to mention some of the more alarming factors. A global response is required to tackle those problems. Therefore, it is important to strengthen cooperation with and provide technical assistance to Governments so that they can enhance their national capacities, whether through non-governmental organizations or through the United Nations system, within the framework of commitments made at the various conferences and under international instruments.

With respect to the legal framework, Guatemala needs to continue to integrate family perspectives into its development process and to strengthen domestic mechanisms for coordinating policies and programmes, taking into account the multilingual, multicultural and multi-ethnic character of our country. We must therefore recognize, respect and promote lifestyles, customs, traditions, modes of social organization and other components of the identity and the worldview of each social group.

Guatemala strongly supports regional efforts to assist families, including the exchange of specialized information and experience concerning family issues and the dissemination of information. It supports the creation of networks at the subregional, regional and inter-regional levels that promote concern for the family, taking into account the cultural, environmental, social and economic conditions of each country.

With respect to the multilateral level, my delegation wishes to express its support for efforts to strengthen the machinery of the United Nations in order to promote and build capacity and to provide technical assistance on family issues to Governments that request it.

Ms. Aranda (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for my delegation to participate in this meeting of the General Assembly devoted to the observance of the tenth anniversary of th International Year of the Family. Mexico welcomes the various activities undertaken by the United Nations to achieve the objectives of the Year and those planned for this important commemoration. We thank the Secretary-General for his substantive and comprehensive report (A/59/176). We agree that it is necessary for the United Nations to play a catalysing role and support the strengthening of the family in planning at the national, regional and global levels.

I shall refer to Mexico's national development plan, which demonstrates the central role of the family in the humanist Government led by President Fox. The social transition in Mexico requires a policy that strengthens families and enables them to plan for the future, educate their children and enjoy the sharing of life that takes place within the family.

On the basis of that document, and taking into account the appeal by the Secretary-General, the Mexican Government has carried out a process of thorough reflection that resulted in the creation of an inter-institutional board, for which more than 72 public and private institutions have formed a preparatory technical committee to study the Mexican family. As a result of those efforts, we have already reviewed the civil law codes of the federal Government and the 32 states comprising the Republic. That review has revealed inconsistencies of family law in the country.

Collected research on the family over the past decade has enabled us to study and geographically pinpoint quantitative data. An examination of existing public policy has shown that we do not have a public policy on family issues. The first results of the survey on family dynamics, which will be completed in March 2005, will give us a more thorough knowledge of qualitative aspects. That study involves 24,000 households and is the most ambitious of its kind. It encompasses three generations in each family and 3,600 life trajectories and provides a network diagram and a lexicon.

It should be noted that thorough study has not meant inaction. We are already elaborating a proposal. The Institute for Legal Research at the National Autonomous University of Mexico is developing a model code to harmonize family law and the Ministry of Labour has proposed initiatives to reconcile work life and family life. The Ministry of Health has issued a family health record book. The Ministry of Education has completed a national model of family education, as well as a national system for the comprehensive development of the family, which is aimed at developing the skills of family members to promote their integral development, thus building a life free of violence.

Our institution acts as a coordinator of this important effort and is being staffed with professional-

level employees so that it can guide public policy concerning the family and the community. To that end, all programmes are being reviewed to ensure that they comply with the goal of supporting and strengthening tasks for which the family is irreplaceable, such as generational equality, cultural transmission, socialization, responsibility and pro-sociality.

It should be pointed out that in Mexico, 92.9 per cent of households are composed of families and 89 per cent of Mexicans today consider their family to be the most important thing in their lives. That has been shown by numerous studies that also show that this belief has been gaining force over the past decade.

It is no secret that the vulnerability suffered by our peoples — insecurity, crime, abuse, abandonment of the elderly, orphaned children and violence — causes enormous imbalances and obliges us to spend millions on institutional policies that in the end can do no more than manage those ills. If we go on like this, a time when will come when all our tax resources will not suffice to counter the effects of vulnerability. If we wish to address the causes, we must look at the family, not only to analyse its weaknesses, which, unfortunately, are many, but also to promote its strengths. When the family stops being a loving environment, social ills are generated. However, if we work to strengthen the family, we will have an important ally of the State that promotes the full enjoyment of the rights of each family member.

Mexico believes that creating public policies with a family and community perspective does not mean imposing a specific model. It requires recognizing the various family structures and giving them a boost in an act of commitment and solidarity in order to make the family functional. In doing so, the State must not fail to carry out its commitments and implement specific policies for individuals that do not have family ties. Strengthening protective factors reduces risk factors. Backed by our research, we firmly believe that the family is a valid and vital institution that will continue to be the fundamental institution of civilization, the great generator of social capital and thus the key strength of Mexico and the world.

We believe it important to renew the validity of and respect for the international commitments that States have made in the area of the protection of the family and its members in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the principle human rights instruments and the outcomes of the World Summit for Social Development, the International Conference on Population and Development and the special session of the General Assembly on children.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): The family is the natural and fundamental unit of society. That has been so since time immemorial. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes that. It remains as valid now as when the Declaration was adopted.

We thank the Secretary-General for his report (A/59/176), as well as for his presence and his remarks this morning.

Values and cultures are not static. They change with time. They differ from place to place. They vary with ethnic origins and religious affiliations. But despite these differences, one element remains constant: it is the belief that the family is society's core component.

For most of us, the term family implies husband and wife and their children. This is the nuclear family. In some societies, it includes close relatives and constitutes the basic economic, social and civic unit. Governments and civil society do well to recognize that central fact. All our economic and social programmes must also bear that in mind. The attainment of every Millennium Development Goal must begin with the family. The family is the main instrument of societal transformation.

A very good example of this is how and why the family, indeed the women in the family, is the focus of Bangladesh's microcredit programmes. These have contributed so significantly to poverty alleviation in our country that they have become models worthy of emulation in countries and societies of comparable milieu.

In Bangladesh, a Government ministry is dedicated to social and family welfare. It works hand in hand with non-governmental organizations and civil society. We believe that marriage between a man and a woman is the linchpin that binds and bonds the family together.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. We applaud the Government of the State of Qatar for hosting the recent Doha International Conference for the Family. We also thank the Consort of the Emir, Her Highness Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al-Misnad, for her keen interest

and contribution. The outcome of the meeting reiterates international commitments towards efforts to strengthen the family.

The family also helps not only to bring up children but to protect their rights. It provides them basic health care and education. It teaches them the need to avoid social evils. Today's children are tomorrow's citizens. The family is, as it always has been, the best school for the promotion of civic culture. That is why we must do our best to support the family and that is why my delegation wholeheartedly endorses the Doha Declaration and the draft resolution now before the Assembly (A/59/L.29).

It is our hope that this tenth anniversary celebration of the International Year of the Family will further motivate us towards promoting and strengthening our efforts on issues pertaining to the family at the United Nations and beyond. We must adopt every effective measure and take every possible step to protect, sustain, support and promote the family in times of peace and war.

Mr. Moon Seoung-hyun (Republic of Korea): It is my great honour to speak on behalf of the Korean delegation, as we gather today to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family.

Ten years ago, the international community came together to underscore the importance of the family for social and human development, pledging support for strengthening family policy and enhancing support to families. Since that time, significant progress has been made in each of those areas, but much work still remains to be done, as the Secretary-General's report (A/59/176) makes clear.

We are pleased to note that over the past decade, notable progress has been made in improving the living conditions and in strengthening the social stability and security of the family. Many countries have enacted new laws or amended laws so as to provide direct benefits to families, and both central and local Governments have established policies or services that target families as beneficiaries.

The Republic of Korea is no exception. My Government has implemented several measures to support family self-sufficiency and promote a caring environment within the family. We are currently in the process of revising our family law to fully obtain gender equality and individual rights in the family structure. Throughout all these processes, the International Year of the Family has guided us by enhancing public awareness of family issues within our society.

We commend the efforts of the United Nations Programme on the Family in organizing a range of initiatives to observe the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. Numerous conferences and events have been held throughout this year to raise awareness of family issues and to give impetus to policy makers to incorporate family issues into national development policy. Other activities, such as the study of the impact of HIV/AIDS on the family and publications of family indicators, have also been important.

As noted in the Secretary-General's report, newly emerging social trends, such as changes in family structure, demographic ageing, migration and the HIV/AIDS pandemic, are having profound effects on families throughout the world. Moreover, in a country like the Republic of Korea, which underwent a rapid modernization process followed by major social changes, the challenges have been daunting. Among other things, low fertility rates and demographic ageing are likely to have a serious impact on our society in the future, and we are currently searching for ways to tackle those issues. Furthermore, as our own example clearly reveals, family policy cannot be separated from other aspects of social policy. Accordingly, an integrated family policy is needed to effectively complement existing sectoral policies.

The tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family comes at an important time in United Nations history. Next year, we will gather to review progress in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The observance of the International Year of the Family has served to highlight the essential role families play in the development process and has underscored the need to further mainstream family issues into national development plans and programmes. The Republic of Korea believes that if we are truly committed to realizing the MDGs, it must be recognized that family policy and social policy are often one and the same.

In closing, I would like to express our hope that today's gathering will provide an opportunity to reaffirm the commitments on the family made 10 years

ago and to identify further actions. If we can build upon our accomplishments and focus on the common ground that we all share, I am certain that the remaining goals of the International Year of the Family will soon be achieved.

Mr. Maurer (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Switzerland attaches great importance to issues concerning the family, and we welcome the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. Switzerland would like to highlight — as the Secretary-General did in his introductory statement — that the family is the basic unit in society and that, in different political, social and economic systems, the family takes on different forms.

Switzerland takes this opportunity to reaffirm the commitments undertaken at the summits in Copenhagen and Geneva in 2000, at the Peking and Peking + 5 summits, at the Cairo and Cairo + 5 summits, at the special session on children and in the context of other United Nations conferences and summits. Switzerland also underscores the importance of legal human rights obligations, in particular as contained in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Switzerland considers that these commitments constitute the political and legal framework for all action concerning the family in its various forms.

International standards exist. The real challenge is implementation. The international community's action must therefore focus on implementing its commitments. In that respect, Switzerland underlines the importance of the participation of all stakeholders in this area at the local, national and international levels.

In its various resolutions on the family, the General Assembly has stipulated that the main activities organized to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family should take place essentially at the local, national and regional levels. The Swiss Government, in collaboration with Pro Familia, an umbrella non-governmental organization active in the area of family policy in Switzerland, has organized a number of activities to commemorate the occasion.

Moreover, Switzerland is committed to drafting a report every five years on the situation of the family. The first report, which examines the structures of family policy at the federal, canton and community levels, has been completed for the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the Observer of the Holy See.

Archbishop Migliore (Holy See) (*spoke in French*): My delegation is delighted to take the floor at the conclusion of the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. Further, this commemoration is taking place at the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly, which is now considering two priorities of the world today: security and development.

Our debates and programmes are focused on the concept of security in the broad sense of the term, encompassing what, in United Nations parlance, are called direct threats, such as terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, and secondary threats, such as unemployment, poverty, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the exploitation of children and women and limited access to housing, healthcare facilities, education and medicines, which all affect human society as a whole in daily life.

Given that the predicted indices of poverty and inequality, which continue to worsen in many countries, are far from encouraging, it is no surprise that reducing poverty is now a top priority on the development agenda. In that context, my delegation expresses its support for the family, which is the basic unit of society by nature and as a result of the vital contribution it is called upon to make in ensuring security and development.

The family, more specifically, the lasting and stable union between a man and a woman, seems the most natural and the most suitable way to ensure procreation and, consequently, the renewal of the generations. Economic growth requires a minimum of demographic growth, achieved through reproduction, which ensures that past generations are replaced. Beyond such demographic considerations, we should recall that it is within that primary natural community of the family that individuals acquire a number of qualities, areas of knowledge and attitudes that enable them one day to be productive and thus constructive creators of society. It is not simply a question of bringing children into the world but of rearing them well. The economic concept of human capital is especially relevant here. As the primary place where

human capital is shaped, the family is truly indispensable to development. It is therefore important to make available all the tools necessary to ensure just recognition of the fact that the family is not simply the centre of consumption but also where genuine wealth is created. That fact is not fully appreciated today.

However, there can be no action in favour of families without first creating the real political will to promote a model. In particular, the expression "the basic unit of society" refers to the precise concept of social order based on the existence of stable communities of people. That concept should be found and recognized at all institutional levels.

Thus, family policy should provide the general framework for taking measures in response to the economic and social challenges of our time. Recognizing the necessity of promoting the family, conceived as a preventive policy, should not mean State interference in the family. No new social rights need be invented. Rather, conditions for justice should be created.

In addition, family policy must be clearly distinguished from social policy. Indeed, social policy suggests assistance aimed at mitigating the gravity of a situation: first reducing its negative effects and then ensuring emergence from a situation judged to be bad. Family policy, on the other hand, should permit sustainable economic development. The goal could never be to abolish the family.

Finally, family policy should be a full-fledged policy. First, it has its objectives: to promote a model — at the very least, not penalizing those wishing to have children. It has its means: fair compensation for expenses connected with education, and genuine recognition of the value of domestic work. Finally, it has its goals: lasting action founded on the criteria of justice and effectiveness, because the family is an investment for tomorrow. Only a real awareness of the importance of those various elements will enable us to implement family policy effectively.

My delegation notes with satisfaction actions in connection with this anniversary taken by various countries, in particular Benin and Qatar.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

We shall now proceed to consider draft resolution A/59/L.29, as orally revised. In that connection, I would like to invite the representative of Qatar to take the floor.

Mr. Al-Bader (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Group of 77 and China is introducing draft resolution A/59/L.29 on celebrating the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, which reflects the will of Member States to respect the family and to demonstrate the importance that we attach to supporting and protecting it.

In resolutions 56/113, 57/164 and 58/15, the General Assembly addressed the question of preparations for and observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family and decided on actions to implement its goals. The present draft resolution commends all Governments, non-governmental organizations and civil society for hosting conferences and events as part of the observation. It also calls upon the United Nations bodies and agencies to promote family-oriented policies. The tenth anniversary has been successful. Now, at the end of the year, we can see that the support of the international community was productive in supporting and protecting the family. Thus, it is important to welcome such success.

The Group of 77 and China sponsored the draft resolution and endeavoured to frame a text that reflected consensus. We welcome the observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family and recognize the excellent achievements to date. After consultations, we took into account the concerns and constructive proposals of other delegations, particularly with regard to ensuring that the principle underlying the draft resolution was not impaired. However, we needed to be flexible. Accordingly, we have made some revisions to the draft so as to take account of the objections raised by some delegations.

After consultations earlier today, we deleted the third, fourth and fifth preambular paragraphs. In the operative part, paragraphs 4 and 5 have been replaced by a single paragraph that reads as follows:

(*spoke in English*)

> "Welcomes the hosting of the regional conference on the family in Africa from 27 to 28 July 2004 by the Government of Benin, and also welcomes the hosting of the Doha International Conference for the Family from

29 to 30 November 2004 by the State of Qatar, and takes note of their outcome;".

(*spoke in Arabic*)

Those are the revisions. We ask that all members support and protect the family by supporting the draft resolution.

The Acting President: Before giving the floor to those representatives who wish to speak in explanation of vote before action is taken on the draft resolution, may I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Hof (Netherlands): I am speaking on behalf of the European Union. The European Union reaffirms its full support for the implementation of the declarations and programmes of action of the Copenhagen Summit, the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Conference, as well as the outcome of the special session on children. We remain convinced that the objectives set forth in the context of those international forums provide a framework for the protection of families as a key element in forging stronger and more coherent models for development throughout the world.

The European Union is deeply committed to family-related issues. As far back as 1989, the European Commission published its first communiqué on family policies. That was followed by important actions such as the 1996 directive on parental leave. Some major areas of attention are reconciling family and work life and improving the living conditions of vulnerable families. The first joint report singled out eight core challenges, ranging from preserving family solidarity to protecting the rights of children by finding new forms of support for the family as a way to prevent poverty and social exclusion, and to promote equality between men and women.

The importance that the European Union attaches to the role of families is exemplified by the Conference on Families, Change and Social Policy in Europe, organized by the Irish presidency of the European Union, which took place in May 2004. The Conference of the European Ministers for Family Affairs will take place in December in Berlin, at the invitation of the German Government.

The concept and composition of families has changed over the course of time, illustrating the fact that the family is a living, dynamic entity. For instance, within the European Union there has been a substantial increase in the number of single-person households. In celebrating the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, the European Union reaffirms its commitment to such ideals and reiterates its support for cohesive policies carried out at the local and international levels, enhancing the condition of families throughout the world and embracing social inclusion as a means to eradicate poverty and discrimination.

The European Union welcomes discussions in the United Nations on issues related to families. We should take the commitments of the Copenhagen, Cairo, Beijing, Madrid and other relevant United Nations summits fully into accoun.. Rather than focusing on ideologies, the debate should focus on the implementation of agreed commitments and their consequences for families and their individual members. National and international policies should also address the needs and rights of all individual family members, in particular women and children.

The European Union therefore regrets that a sponsor of the draft resolution on celebrating the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, as contained in document A/59/L.29, has not been willing to address the concerns of the European Union and other delegations. The European Union supports draft resolution A/C.3/59/L.2, entitled "Celebration of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family and beyond", which the Third Committee adopted by consensus. The European Union believes that that text reflects the international consensus that exists with regard to issues relating to the International Year of the Family.

Unfortunately, the sponsors have brought non-consensual elements to draft resolution A/59/L.29, and we regret that we are therefore unable to support it. The European Union will disassociate itself from the text of the draft resolution to be adopted. We hope and trust that future initiatives on the International Year of the Family or on family issues in general will build upon the traditional international consensus. The European Union requests this statement to be fully reflected in the records.

The Acting President: Due note will be taken of the statement of the representative of the Netherlands.

We have heard the only speaker in explanation of vote.

Before proceeding to take action on the draft resolution, I should like to announce that since the introduction of draft resolution A/59/L.29, Armenia, Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation have joined the list of sponsors.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/59/L.29, as orally revised.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/59/L.29, as orally revised?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution 59/111).

The Acting President: Before giving the floor to those representatives who wish to speak in explanation of vote on the resolution just adopted, may I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes, and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Nornberg (Norway): I would like to take this opportunity to explain Norway's position on the resolution just adopted.

Norway places great emphasis on questions relating to, and the role of, families in society. We regard the following to be key consensus documents for policies and actions relating to the family in all its various forms: the outcome documents of the World Summit for Social Development, held at Copenhagen, and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly; of the Fourth World Conference on Women, held at Beijing, and the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (Beijing+5); and of the International Conference on Population and Development, held at Cairo, and the twenty-first special session of the General Assembly. Moreover, we continue to stand firmly committed to basic international human rights instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child as fundamental parts of the framework for policies and actions relating to families.

In the light of those sets of basic international political and legal commitments, it is Norway's view that today we should focus, first and foremost, on entering an era of implementing commitments previously made. The development of new declarations and outcome documents in a non-United Nations context and with a selective focus on some of the various forms of the family that exist could, in our view, prove counterproductive in that regard. Bearing that in mind, we feel compelled today to dissociate ourselves from the consensus on the resolution just adopted.

Ms. Groux (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Switzerland, which attaches great importance to family-related issues, did not want to oppose the consensus adoption of draft resolution A/59/L.29. However, like other delegations, my delegation dissociates itself from the consensus.

As we stated this morning, Switzerland echoes the Secretary-General's introductory statement in emphasizing that the family is the basic unit of society and that, depending on the cultural, social and political system concerned, the family takes various forms. Switzerland also takes the opportunity of today's observance to reaffirm the commitments made at the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly, at the Fourth World Conference on Women and the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, at the International Conference on Population and Development, at the special session of the General Assembly on children and in the context of other United Nations summits and conferences. Switzerland has also noted the importance of legal commitments undertaken in the context of legal instruments related to human rights, particularly the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Switzerland believes that those commitments are the political and legal frameworks for all actions related to the family in all its forms.

We must note that international standards are not lacking today and that the real challenge lies in their implementation. The action of the international community must therefore focus on the implementation of those commitments. We congratulate the Governments of Benin and Qatar on their contributions to the observance of today's anniversary. However, while taking note of the results of these conferences, Switzerland does not endorse their contents.

Mr. Adsett (Canada): Canada joins other delegations in dissociating itself from the consensus on draft resolution A/59/L.29. Canada attaches great importance to the family and to family-related issues. Although we support the aim of that text, we are concerned by what is not in the text. In particular, we

believe that it is important to recognize that, in different cultural, political and social systems, various forms of the family exist. That reality has been recognized on numerous occasions in the past, including the Fourth World Conference on Women, held at Beijing, the World Summit for Social Development, held at Copenhagen, and the special session of the General Assembly on children, held two years ago. We regret that a sponsor has not been willing to address the concerns of Canada and other delegations in that regard, and we therefore join other delegations in dissociating ourselves from the consensus on the text.

Mr. Choi (Australia): Australia fully supports the comments made by the delegations of Norway, Switzerland and Canada, and we wish to dissociate ourselves from the consensus on this resolution.

Ms. Hauksdóttir (Iceland): My delegation would like to second the views already expressed by the representatives of the European Union and Norway and by others and to align ourselves with the statements made by previous speakers dissociating them from the consensus on draft resolution A/59/L.29.

Mr. Schurti (Liechtenstein): My delegation also takes the floor in explanation of position and endorses what was said by the representative of the European Union and by other previous speakers.

Liechtenstein is committed to implementing existing instruments with regard to the well-being of families, particularly the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and special sessions of the General Assembly held during the past decade. My delegation regrets that some non-consensus elements were included in the draft resolution just adopted. We found the negotiation process to be flawed and non-inclusive. Liechtenstein therefore dissociates itself from the consensus on the resolution just adopted.

Mr. MacKay (New Zealand): New Zealand has been an active participant in United Nations debates on the family, without exception, and we have joined consensus on family resolutions in the past. We believe that families are the fundamental building blocks of our communities, our societies and our nations. We must support them, and we must commit ourselves to recognizing the family as a source of strength, belonging and cohesion.

More than most countries, we have been prepared to back up our words with action. In the course of the past year, New Zealand has announced two major initiatives to support the family. Together, those initiatives represent the most significant advances in decades in support of the family and in the promotion and protection of the rights of the child in New Zealand.

First, New Zealand has established a Commission for the Family to advocate for the family within Government and in the community. Secondly, New Zealand has announced governmental financial assistance for families, entitled the "working for families package". It will deliver additional per-week income to low- and middle-income families with dependent children throughout our country.

New Zealand's commitment to the family is indisputable. We are therefore disappointed that our views during the negotiations on this resolution and others like it, and the efforts of those countries that have voiced concerns similar to ours, have been misrepresented as anti-family. Let me therefore take the time to be clear about the difficulties that we have with elements of this resolution.

New Zealand is increasingly concerned that the debate on the family is becoming a vehicle for attacking long-standing consensus agreements on tolerance of family diversity and on the rights of women and children. We are concerned, for example, that the Doha Declaration omits a long-standing agreed reference to the fact that many forms of the family exist and that it contains no reference to the rights of women and children. The Declaration should have acknowledged that the rights of individuals within families should also be protected and that individuals have the right to leave family environments in which their well-being is at risk.

Given that the Doha Declaration is inconsistent with United Nations agreements reached at Cairo, Beijing and Copenhagen, we are concerned that it has been noted in this resolution. It is particularly unusual for this Assembly to note documents that were produced by conferences to which not all Governments were invited.

Many forms of the family exist. That is the reality, and we cannot ignore it. In New Zealand, our

families are increasingly diverse, reflecting the diversity of our people's cultures and circumstances, and indeed the Secretary-General himself in this Assembly this morning referred to the increasing diversity of families. We therefore regret that this text and the Doha Declaration together promote only one model of the family at the expense of others, and in so doing, they ignore a long-standing consensus on such matters.

New Zealand is, therefore, like others who have spoken, compelled to disassociate itself from the consensus on this particular resolution.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in explanation of vote after the vote. Three delegations have indicated their wish to make general statements after the adoption of the resolution.

Mr. Adechi (Benin) (*spoke in French*): Benin sets great store by issues related to the family. We would like especially to hail the efforts made by the international community during the decade to support the family.

We would have liked to have greater support for the resolution that we have just adopted for celebrating the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. We see, therefore, that there is still some work that needs to be done, and we have hope that all delegations will be able to reach a broader consensus than the one we have attained.

In the meantime, we will have to implement the existing text, on which the entire international community agrees. It is with this is mind that the Cotonou Conference acted such that the drafting and adopting of the plan of action to be adopted there would, to the extent possible, rally the greatest consensus possible.

Therefore, we must consider, within the international community, the important issue of the implementation of the gains made during the International Year of the Family, and I am referring specifically to the Plan of Action on the Family in Africa. We hope we can count on the support of the entire international community for the implementation of that Plan of Action.

Mr. Cumberbach Miguén (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): In joining in the support given to the draft resolution submitted by Qatar on behalf of the Group of 77, the delegation of Cuba would like to welcome the adoption of a resolution that is designed to draw attention to events that the Chairman of our Group and the delegation of Benin have conducted to promote the well-being of families in all their forms.

This is not the first time that the General Assembly takes note of accomplishments resulting from an event that took place somewhere, whether the event be a part of the United Nations or not.

None of the main sponsors of the text claims to set themselves up as the greatest world promoter of topics of protection and assistance to the family. This is a single text designed to draw attention to activities that are to be carried out and that could serve as a framework for a better exchange of views on such an important topic, and would contribute to creating a greater atmosphere of cooperation among various cultures, rather than a confrontation between them.

Mr. Al-Bader (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the Group of 77 and China, I would like to thank the delegations for their great support for this draft resolution. There is no doubt that the adoption of this resolution demonstrates the determination of Member States to honour their commitments to families. This reflects the importance we attach to supporting and protecting families. This is an important testimony to the success of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. This is a successful crowning of the many activities and events that took place throughout the world for the family.

The General Assembly should provide a follow-up to these very important issues, and it is incumbent upon us to implement the goals of the International Year of the Family by ensuring an effective follow-up to these activities.

We must also talk about the positive results of the meetings in Benin and Doha. The General Assembly has in the past noted with satisfaction certain activities. I think it would be appropriate here to express our satisfaction with these concrete results, especially in the light of resolution 57/190 that was adopted by the General Assembly, and the Yokohama Global Commitment 2001 adopted by the second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children.

The General Assembly in its resolution 55/79 addressed the issue of children in armed conflict, and it

expressed satisfaction with the positive results of the International Conference on War-Affected Children, which was held in Winnipeg, Canada, in 2000.

There are also other gains that have been made at other conferences. So Doha is not an exception. That is why I would like to thank very sincerely all delegations that sponsored and supported this draft resolution.

The Acting President: The General Assembly has thus concluded this meeting devoted to the observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family and this stage of its consideration of agenda item 94.

The meeting rose at 1.30 p.m.